

# Plunging into danger

Divers face daunting task to defend five-medal haul at Asian Games

By LIM TEIK HUAT

**PETALING JAYA:** It's not going to be a rosy prospect for the diving team at the Asian Games in Indonesia if the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games results are anything to go by.

For the first time since the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, the national divers failed to win an individual medal.

The three medals came from the women's synchro events as their male counterparts were not in contention from the start.

Pandelela Rinong-Cheong Jun Hoong lived up to their status as reigning Olympic silver medallists by delivering the gold in the women's 10m platform synchro.

Nur Dhabitah Sabri-Leong Mun Yee contributed bronze medals in the women's 10m platform synchro and 3m springboard synchro.

In Glasgow four years ago, it was a haul of one gold, two silvers and one bronze.

The next mission is the Asian Games in August and defending the five-medal haul (two silvers, three bronzes) from Incheon four years ago will be a daunting prospect.

Winning the gold at the Asian Games is a tall order as China are a class above the rest at the moment, especially in the women's competition.

China have discovered a lethal new pairing in 14-year-olds Zhang Jiaqi-Zhang Minjie for the women's 10m platform synchro as they

splashed to gold by more than a 20-point winning margin in the first two legs of the Diving World Series in Beijing and Japan.

North Korea's Kim Kuk-hyang-Kim Mi-rae should pose the biggest threat in the women's 10m platform synchro and Pandelela-Jun Hoong will have to be at their best to secure the silver medal at the Asian Games.

It's going to be very tough for Pandelela and Jun Hoong in the 10m platform individual, given their current form, to beat the Chinese and North Koreans for a spot on the podium.

In the men's competition, the standards of senior national divers Ooi Tze Liang, Chew Yiwei and Ahmad Amsyar Azman are behind their Japanese and South Korean counterparts.

Tze Liang, Yiwei and Amsyar were medallists at the last Asian Games in Incheon but they can no longer take things for granted as Japan and South Korea have improved tremendously since then.

National coach Christian Brooker is optimistic the divers have what it takes to be competitive at the big stage.

"The most important thing is to let the divers know we have their backs and there is no fear of them getting reprimanded if they perform a bad dive.

"Only when they are comfortable, will they go the extra mile to learn and improvise.

"Everyone wants to improve on diving in order to be perfect and to do that, they work on their limitations in training," said the Australian, who came in January.



**It ain't easy:** Reigning Olympic silver medallists Cheong Jun Hoong (right) and Pandelela Rinong have to face threats from the Chinese and North Koreans in the Indonesia Asian Games in August. — Reuters